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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

TITLE:

The Critical Capability: CORDS District Advisor Teams in Vietnam

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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Executive Summary

Title: The Critical Capability: CORDS District Advisor Teams in Vietnam

Author: Major W. V. Osborne, United States Marine Corps

Thesis: The district level advisory effort conducted under the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) between 1967 – 1972 was a success, which was “truly beneficial for the pacification program and contributed substantially to the general war effort.”ⁱ

Discussion: CORDS represented a unique approach to counterinsurgency and pacification. Conducted in the shadow of a big unit war, it was an exceptional combination of military and civilian power under a single civilian coordinator inside a military organization. However, the approach worked. By the end of active American involvement in the war in 1972, the guerilla war for rural Vietnam had been won by the South Vietnamese. While the war was certainly lost in the end, it was at the hands of conventional North Vietnamese Army units in large scale offensives launched from across the northern border.ⁱⁱ This is not to say that there were no insurgents left at all. Rather, the infrastructure had been so decimated that the economy and people of the South, especially in the Mekong Delta, were relatively prosperous and supportive of the central government.

Ultimately this was made possible by the success of Vietnamese administrators, soldiers, and policemen at the district and village level. From the American side, however, the district senior advisor (DSA) and his team were the critical link. DSAs represented American support for the GVN. More than that, they brought military and non-military resources to rural Vietnam. Great innovation in the application of resources led to exceptional fusion of operations and intelligence that maximized the use of local sources, despite relatively poor police and police intelligence capabilities. DSAs cultivated close relationships with their counterparts, often securing their trust. This allowed the U. S. Government to influence the progress of the “other war” at the critical district level.

Conclusion: CORDS, specifically district advisor teams, worked. The insurgency was largely defeated because district level stability was established by the Vietnamese with the help of their American counterparts.

ⁱ Truong, Ngo Quan. "RVNAF and US Operational Cooperation and Coordination." *Defense Technical Information Center*. US Army Center of Military History. 1980. www.dtic.mil (accessed January 11, 2012), 175.

ⁱⁱ Colby, William, interview by Ted Gittinger. *The Virtual Vietnam Center and Archive at Texas Tech University Interview with William Colby* (www.virtual.vietnam.ttu.edu, accessed January 12, 2012), (June 2, 1981), 13, 53.

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“Each American serving in the Republic of Vietnam has, either directly or indirectly, a part in this extensive campaign to demonstrate that the Government of South Vietnam offers citizens the greatest opportunity for a free, peaceful and full life.”¹

INTRODUCTION

Few topics since 1945 are as widely and diversely written about, and perhaps poorly understood, as the United States’ effort in Vietnam during the Second Indochina War. The length of the war; domestic American social and political changes which magnified and were magnified by the war; and the vitriol and acrimony that surrounds defeat, no matter how it occurred all contribute to the highly nuanced body of work about the Vietnam War. Lost in this sea of words are many examples of American and Vietnamese successes in countering the insurgency. The district level advisory effort conducted under the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) program was one such success, which was “truly beneficial for the pacification program and contributed substantially to the general war effort.”²

The CORDS program, which ran from 1967-1972, was designed to provide a comprehensive approach to what was officially termed Pacification, but regularly called “The Other War.”³ That is, the part of the American and Vietnamese effort to develop secure, politically and economically stable rural areas to limit insurgent sanctuary and political support. Though CORDS offices existed at every level of the American and Vietnamese political structures, the district advisor team represented the furthest reach of the American advisory effort in Vietnam. District teams were among the most isolated American units, living with their Vietnamese counterparts in almost all of the nearly 250 districts of South Vietnam.

Despite the importance, in a Maoist model war, of developing local, rural areas into sources of strength from which the insurgent can topple the urban based national government,⁴ resources allocated by Military Assistance Command – Vietnam (MAC-V) to the CORDS

program were limited. The CORDS district level effort relied on 8-12 man teams of junior officers and enlisted personnel to advise entire districts of several thousand Vietnamese on all manner of daily civic life during war. By necessity, the advisors developed a diverse set of skills that allowed them to harness some of the resources the United States brought to Vietnam. These diverse skills, along with an incredible level of independence and autonomy given to the district senior advisor (DSA), made the district advisor team an effective, critical component to US success during the Vietnam War. DSA's, working with the Vietnamese district chief, local forces, and their own provincial senior advisor (PSA) closely integrated operations, intelligence, and development efforts in rural Vietnamese districts.

This paper will review the integrated development and pacification effort in Vietnam. Then, the design and organization of the district team will be discussed, followed by a discussion of team operations. Third, the importance and effectiveness of relationships with Vietnamese partners and higher and adjacent US units will be discussed. The last section covers assessment methods and their usefulness.

BACKGROUND

The Vietnamese approach to the Vietnam War had always included some type of development or pacification programs. Most of these programs integrated security and governance. Some of them also included, to some extent, development.⁵ By 1969, official literature described pacification as,

a military, political, economic and social process. It means establishing or reestablishing local government responsive to and involving the participation of the citizens; providing sustained credible security; destroying the enemy's underground government; asserting or reasserting GVN political control; involvement of the people *in* the central government; initiating economic and social activity capable of self-sustenance and expansion.⁶

America's earliest involvement in Vietnam largely focused on supporting the French military as it consolidated power after World War II. Throughout the 1950s, the United States sent large amounts of money and equipment, but few people. Although other development programs had been tried, the earliest program clearly oriented on an integrated pacification strategy was the Strategic Hamlet Program (*Ap Chien Luoc*).⁷ Beginning in 1961, this Vietnamese-led program intended to relocate Vietnamese civilians in at risk areas into newly built, fortified hamlets, built with Government funds. The strategic hamlet was more than a security arrangement; it would serve as the basis for a bottom up reconstruction of Vietnamese society that would replace the old corrupt society with a new, cohesive, Vietnam.⁸

Championed and directed by President Ngo Dinh Diem's brother, Nhu, the project was seen by senior Americans as the first real attempt by the South Vietnamese to fight a "people's war."⁹ Informed by British success in Malaya as well as positive impacts of ongoing Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Special Forces (SF) efforts to support rural areas, Nhu went outside of the military approach that had dominated previous anti-Communist campaigns and developed a village-centric plan.¹⁰ According to a 1962 report written by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) officer Rufus Phillips, the Vietnamese Government also saw strategic hamlets as a means for instituting democracy in rural Vietnam.¹¹ Phillips found the program was "achieving conspicuous success in several areas."¹² Despite this optimistic view, Phillips also wrote that Vietnamese national leadership lacked the "inspired political leadership" and that American support, while useful, needed to be "sustained and constructive."¹³

Unfortunately, neither component was completely available after President Ngo Dinh Diem was overthrown and killed in late 1963.¹⁴ American support was recharacterized and made dependent on measures of performance more oriented on offensive operations, rather than the

defensive nature of the original program.¹⁵ On the Vietnamese side, Strategic Hamlets were inseparably associated with the Diem Regime, making them unpopular with the new Vietnamese Government.¹⁶ The Strategic Hamlet program also suffered from bad or mischaracterizing press reports. Contemporary reports, with some accuracy, reported that the program was overextended¹⁷ and that Vietnamese villagers were unhappy at leaving their original homes to move into the new hamlets because they were taken too far from their ancestors' burial places.¹⁸ General William Westmoreland, in his autobiography, indicated that the hamlets had been viewed as the, "conclusive answer to winning the war,"¹⁹ and that the expectation of their spectacular success was in some part responsible for their failure. Robert Komer, in a 1972 pre-mortem on US failure in Vietnam, found three factors responsible for failure of *Ap Chien Luoc*: the Vietnamese Government made the program too big and then ran it poorly; they failed to adequately train the local defense forces, and they never properly resourced the effort.²⁰ William Colby, in his memoirs as well as post-war interviews, indicates that the program was hobbled by a transition from CIA lead to military lead for the program,²¹ called Operation Switchback.²² In the end, the Strategic Hamlet Program failed because it was entirely hitched to Nhu and the Diem Administration. In what was essentially a political struggle, a strategy so fully identified with a fallen political leader could not continue unless thoroughly rebranded.

Diem's assassination and the end of the Strategic Hamlet Program did not end pacification programs. The coup led to a period of instability throughout the upper echelons of South Vietnam as military and civilian leaders sorted themselves out and realigned political blocs.²³ William Nighswonger, a USAID employee in Vietnam who later wrote a detailed study of early 1960s pacification programs for the Department of Defense, found that post-coup

pacification planning was frequent, but disrupted by, “red tape and repeated political eruptions.”²⁴

In March 1964, a new National program called Victory (*Chien Thang*) was introduced. The plan included five steps to meet six criteria before a pacified “New Life Hamlet” (*Ap Tan Sinh*) hamlet was considered complete.²⁵ In a study conducted for the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA), R. Michael Pearce examined results in Hau Nghia Province through early 1965. While the results were, on the whole, positive, the project was not necessarily coordinated with efforts anywhere else and the six village criteria were unrealistic.²⁶ Elsewhere, the lack of central direction, coupled with the introduction of American conventional force units, led to other permutations of post-Strategic Hamlet pacification efforts including Marine sponsored efforts in Quang Nam province around the Da Nang airbase, Ambassador Lodge supported efforts in Long An Province, Westmoreland supported efforts around Saigon (especially *Hop Tac*), and USAID efforts in An Giang Province.²⁷ The Army and MACV also expanded the advisory program to include the first real district advisor teams under the District Advisor Program. Started in early 1964 as 2 man teams in 13 districts, by the end of 1965 the program included 6 man teams in 168 of South Vietnam’s 242 districts.²⁸ All of the efforts seemed to make some progress in that attacks were generally down, economic activity was up, government control was improved and the Viet Cong were responding by paying greater attention to areas where pacification programs were ongoing.²⁹ However, from the end of 1963 through early 1966 pacification programs seemed to lack the coordination of resources and focus of effort required to counter the guerrilla threat more widely and effectively throughout South Vietnam.^{30,31}

By late 1965, the lack of a centrally coordinated pacification program had gained President Johnson's attention.³² Executive direction got debate going, and most of the stakeholders met in Hawaii during February 1966. During this conference, several important steps were taken toward establishing a coordinated US-GVN, military and civilian, pacification program.³³ Foremost among them was the plan to bring the various US civilian elements of pacification under a single manager. William Porter, a career diplomat serving as the Deputy Ambassador³⁴, was appointed to be the lead in Vietnam, and Robert Komer was assigned to head up planning in Washington.³⁵ By late 1966, however, much of the senior leadership recognized the need to put the pacification effort under a single *military* commander. This was in recognition that the military was much better resourced than the civilian agencies and that the MACV leadership had the appropriate influence with the military officers at the top of the Vietnamese government. At the same time, the Vietnamese had once again brought pacification programs under a single manager by establishing a Ministry for Revolutionary Development.³⁶

While appointing a single US military and civilian commander for all pacification efforts was still several months away, by late 1966 "a major effort was initiated avoiding past errors and embarking upon a meaningful program to, while providing security to the people, deny the enemy the base of popular support without which he cannot exist."³⁷ Following the Guam Conference in March 1967, Robert Komer was appointed as General Westmoreland's Deputy Commander for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support.³⁸ Komer had been a driving force in the plan to unify the military and civilian lines of authority. President Johnson thought he had the personality to force the new pacification plan into place.³⁹

The fundamental difference between CORDS and earlier pacification programs was that it put the entire pacification advising and support effort under a single manager within MACV.

As James Hall, a military DSA in 1965-1966 and then a civilian DSA in 1971-1972 put it, “CORDS was a major improvement in coordinating military/civilian/intel activities.”⁴⁰ This was different from earlier programs where uniformed personnel, including district and provincial advisors, worked directly for MACV while civilians worked for the Embassy or Central Intelligence Agency, no matter what their actual place of duty.⁴¹

In order to ensure the program had senior enough representation while also mitigating the militarization of the pacification effort, Komer (replaced by William Colby in late 1968) was appointed the Deputy (with the rank of Ambassador) to the Commander USMACV for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (DEPCORDS) [figure 1]. A staff section to coordinate and integrate all elements of the US Government involved in pacification - Assistant Chief of Staff for CORDS (MACCORDS) - was also set up inside MACV [figure 2]. Plans and policies for Americans working for the State Department, US Information Agency (USIA), US Agency for International Development (USAID) or MACV in support of South Vietnam’s pacification effort came from the Ambassador, through COMUSMACV, to DEPCORDS and from there on to the various elements engaged in pacification work.⁴²

CORDS brought with it new, specific goals.⁴³ By 1969, stated goals were:

1. Providing territorial security for 90% of the population by the end of 1969.
2. Eliminating the Viet Cong infrastructure.
3. Organize two million people for self defense and distribute 400,000 weapons.
4. Establish local government in all villages in the land.
5. Reduce the number of refugees to one million - resettle 300,000.
6. Increase number of ralliers to 20,000 under the *Chieu Hoi* program.
7. Intensify propaganda and information efforts.
8. Stimulate the rural economy.

While the goals may not all have been met, they addressed the scope of what MACV and CORDS leadership thought was possible only two years into the program. The coordinated, centrally supported and directed pacification program focused on the district and village level

government in rural areas made CORDS work [see figures 3 and 4]. Not only were there parallel, dual American and Vietnamese chains of command, but CORDS was based on the traditional basic unit of government, the village.⁴⁴ The key component to implementing American components of the plan was the element closest to the village – the district advisor team.⁴⁵

THE DISTRICT ADVISOR TEAM

Before large conventional American units deployed to Vietnam in mid-1965, advisor duty was desirable for an Army officer. Whether an officer was assigned to an ARVN unit or to a Province team was by individual or command preference.⁴⁶ In the early CORDS era, military district advisors were not specially selected. The DSA, typically an army major,⁴⁷ was assigned to the military region and then further assigned to the district. Other officers and all enlisted personnel, including intelligence advisors, weapons specialists, medics and radio operators were not necessarily assigned to specific districts or provinces until they arrived in Vietnam [figures 5 and 6]. In some cases the deputy DSA was promoted to DSA when a vacancy was created or, at least in one case in Di An in 1970, when the Vietnamese district chief asked for a substandard DSA to be replaced by the deputy.⁴⁸ Cultural aptitude, language ability, and previous training or overseas experience was not a prerequisite though many of the advisors did possess some of these skills prior to their selection for duty with CORDS.

In some districts, 33 of them in early 1970, civilians were assigned as the DSA.⁴⁹ In situations where the DSA was a civilian, the deputy DSA was usually a military officer. This officer might either be a captain or a first lieutenant.⁵⁰ Civilian advisors were usually USAID employees with a rank equivalent to captain or major. In some cases, the civilian advisors had previous military experience in Vietnam, as was the case with the Phong Phu DSA in Phong

Dinh province in 1971 and 1972.⁵¹ Other civilian advisors had served in other parts of the world with USAID, or had some other relevant experience. A civilian Foreign Service officer (FSO) assigned as DSA in Lich Hoi Thuong district, Ba Xuyen province, had served for two years with the Peace Corps in Nepal prior to volunteering to work in Vietnam.⁵²

In all assignment cases leadership in Vietnam played a key role in determining exactly what billet an individual filled. In addition to the previously mentioned situation where the Vietnamese district chief asked for the relief of one officer and the appointment of another as his senior advisor, senior CORDS leadership at the province and region had great latitude in making assignments. John Paul Vann, closely associated with CORDS for nearly all of its existence, was well known for personally appointing DSAs.⁵³ Vann was also reputed to have fired advisors for not knowing the price of rice in the local market. In 1972, Robert Komer claimed that, at least for key personnel, he and his staff were able to both recruit and reject military and civilian personnel assigned to the program.⁵⁴ “And remember that out of 5-6,000 U.S. advisors, the number of really key guys (including 44 province advisors and all the district senior advisors) was less than 400.”⁵⁵

Under CORDS, the normal district team had eight members.⁵⁶ However, this varied widely from district to district. Some districts had as few as 5 or 6,⁵⁷ while others had as many as 13.⁵⁸ Team size was dictated by available manpower as well as province and region level requirements. This certainly affected operational workload and risk acceptance. Often, a single advisor would accompany local forces on missions. Any requirement to travel in teams of Americans, with multiple vehicles, or with certain kinds of weapons either did not exist or was not obeyed. In addition to the DSA and deputy DSA, the teams usually included an enlisted medic and radio operator. Some teams included an additional officer assigned to intelligence

duties; this was especially the case in 1969 and 1970 when a number of military intelligence lieutenants were sent to assist in the establishment of district intelligence operations coordination centers (DIOCCs). The team might also include an enlisted logistics specialist, operations specialist, intelligence expert, or some other type of specialist. In duties, however, the teams often paid no heed to rank or specialty, or military or civilian status. With somewhere between 6 and 12 personnel, everyone needed to perform more than just a narrow set of duties. This included civilians who were, at least those who worked for John Paul Vann, to accompany district forces on military operations.⁵⁹ With the combined military and civilian effort, military personnel and civilians regularly worked for each other. Despite the small size of the teams, there was not necessarily a demand at the district level to make them any larger. According to one DSA, more people on the team would have increased the administrative and logistical requirements for the team without necessarily improving the time spent or quality of advising.⁶⁰

Advisor tour lengths were not necessarily any longer than the regular 12 month Vietnam tour. However, many advisors were assigned to Vietnam more than once and many others voluntarily extended. DSAs and PSAs, in some later cases, were assigned to 18 or 24 month tours in Vietnam. Lt. Gen. Ngo Quang Truong, a well known ARVN corps commander, wrote after the war that longer DSA tours, “not only benefitted the advisory system in terms of personnel stability, it also enabled the adviser to assist the territorial forces and the population more effectively because of his long experience and familiarity with the locality and its environment.”⁶¹ CORDS advisors benefitted from having few options other than to move from one district to another. There were few, if any, opportunities to move to a staff job in a more secure rear area as was so often the case with officers assigned to regular American military units. To some extent, continuity was created through offset rotations of team personnel. Since

the advisor teams were not trained and deployed as a team, but rather joined and left the team on an individual basis, it was rare for an entire team to move at the same time. This allowed for continuity between team members and their Vietnamese counterparts, even if the DSA or other advisor was only in the district for a year.

While teams did not train together prior to deploying, military and civilian officers did attend specialized training prior to deploying to Vietnam as an advisor. For army officers, training was conducted at the Special Warfare School at Fort Bragg. In 1967, the School offered four different Military Assistance Training Advisor (MATA) courses; a corps/division course for advisors expecting to serve on senior staffs, a sector/unit course for lower echelon units, a psychological operations advisor course, and a civil affairs advisor course.⁶² By 1971 course offerings had changed to reflect changes in pacification programs. MATA courses for ARVN advisors, senior NCOs, and CORDS advisors were available, as was a Military Assistance Security Advisor (MASA) course for intelligence officers destined for Phoenix billets.⁶³ The courses were between 6 and 12 weeks long and covered area studies, military strategy and tactics and Vietnamese language training.⁶⁴ Enlisted personnel, other than the above mentioned senior NCOs, did not receive any specialized advisor training prior to deployment.⁶⁵ The courses, even the 12 week version, could not completely prepare a district advisor for the exceptionally wide variety of tasks he was expected to complete. Since DSAs were responsible for civil and military advisory support, in a rural environment, with varied subcultures and accents, it would have been extremely difficult to provide complete training in any reasonable amount of time.

Civilian CORDS personnel, and some military PSAs, conducted a much longer training program – up to 12 months.⁶⁶ Training was managed at the Vietnam Training Center (VTC) at what was then called the State Department Foreign Service Institute (FSI).⁶⁷ Language training

was a significant portion of the training, up to 352 hours. A 1969 course syllabus outlines four basic courses each advisor would attend; a six week basic course, a one week course at Fort Bragg on military skills, five weeks reserved for intensive language training, and then eight weeks of district operations training. The basic course was designed to introduce students to the economy, culture, history of, and U. S. Government operations in, Vietnam. The military course was focused very much on introducing students to weapons, radios, and supporting arms.⁶⁸ Civilian DSAs were expected to understand how to employ American supporting arms in support of district forces.⁶⁹ Once again, though the VTC training was more thorough, a certain amount of understanding how to work across cultures was impossible to teach.⁷⁰ Rather, it had to be learned through experience in a foreign culture. Previous experience abroad, especially in Asia, was valuable.

Language training was probably the most valuable of the skills taught in any of the courses. Additional language training would have improved the number of CORDS officers capable of easily dealing with Vietnamese in their own language. Nearly all interviews and recollections of advisors indicate the importance of basic Vietnamese language skills and indicate that more time spent learning Vietnamese would have been beneficial. In addition to the benefits in interacting with Vietnamese counterparts, at least one senior CORDS official was rumored to take a favorable outlook of those CORDS personnel who knew Vietnamese.⁷¹

In addition to district teams, two other types of advisors frequently operated at or below the district level. These were Mobile Advisory Team (MAT) advisors, and Combined Action Platoon (CAP) squads. CAP squads existed in areas where Marine Corps units were operating, and paired an infantry squad with a Popular Forces platoon. MATs operated throughout the country and were intended to provide Regional Forces and Popular Forces (RF/PF) and People's

Self Defense Force (PSDF) units with operational training beyond what the district team provided. These teams usually consisted of two company grade officers, three American enlisted personnel and an ARVN interpreter. Training for U. S. MAT personnel included the MATA course as well as an additional two week school in Vietnam.⁷² In 1970, Quang Nam province reported 15 manned MATs and an additional 3 planned but not manned teams.⁷³ CORDS leadership reported a total of 353 total MATs across South Vietnam for the same year.⁷⁴ Controlled by the PSA, MATs were designed to spend approximately 30 days in a district. However, teams did not always move that often, and in some cases ended up executing duties similar to a DSA, but for a non-district center village.⁷⁵ MATs often relied on the district teams for support, as Peter Tomsen, a civilian DSA during 1969-70 put it, “we assisted the MAT in every dimension, including in helping it call in air support to beat off attacks and arranging for dust-offs.”⁷⁶

While additional language training, more detailed training for enlisted personnel, and earlier association between training and exact billet would likely have resulted in better prepared advisors, some of the most important advisor skills could not be taught in a training environment anyway. Skills in cross-cultural communication were best learned through cultural immersion, even if it was not through previous travel or work in Vietnam. For this reason, tour length was another important factor. Tours of 18-24 months generally led to better relationships and thus better results for advisor teams. Despite existing tables of organization, CORDS regional leadership and PSAs held significant sway over actual assignments. This allowed a measure of flexibility in billet assignment of advisory personnel, CORDS’ most important resource. The ability to select personnel for key billets, as well as the ability to vet advisors was

the single most important personnel policy in managing the approximately 7,000 people assigned to CORDS at any one time.

VIETNAMESE UNITS

While the district team was primarily responsible for advising the district chief, a Vietnamese major or lieutenant colonel, they also spent a great deal of time with the forces available to the district chief. These included local popular forces (PF), any regional forces (RF) assigned to the district, the Peoples' Self Defense Force (PSDF), the National Police (NP), and Revolutionary Development (RD) Cadres. Most advisors operated in districts without additional U. S. or other Free World Military Assistance Forces (FWMAF) present. Many districts also had no regular ARVN presence. When they did, ARVN units were often focused on bigger enemy units, main force VC and the NVA.⁷⁷

The main unit available to the district chief was the popular forces (PF). Most villages had a PF platoon, which was authorized either 32 or 35 troops but did not always have its full complement. PF formally worked for the subsector commander.⁷⁸ However, these platoons were usually under the operational control of the village or hamlet chief of the community in which they worked.⁷⁹ PF troops were often from the local area, but were full time soldiers. The commander of the PF was an NCO. In many cases these troops had been fighting in the district for years and some of the more senior among them were highly respected by both locals and advisors.⁸⁰ Training for PF soldiers, when available, was a modified version of the ARVN basic course and lasted 11 weeks at one of the 14 PF Training Centers throughout South Vietnam.⁸¹ PF conducted a range of offensive and defensive operations, though offensive operations were generally in support of RF or ARVN operations. However, as is common in poor, war torn countries, the PF suffered from extensive corruption problems. In some cases, the PF were

thoroughly infiltrated by the Viet Cong. For example, after the war John Haseman, a DSA in 1972, was told that some of the district intelligence staff and the district administrative officer had been VC.⁸² At best, this negated some of the benefits that this critical force brought to the district.⁸³

Regional Forces (RF) were also available for employment in the district. These forces were the next level up in training and equipment. When quotas were available, PF soldiers attended the same basic and advanced training courses as regular ARVN troops.⁸⁴ Usually recruited from, and stationed in, a given province, RF were controlled by the province chief but often placed under the operational control of a district chief.⁸⁵ RF companies resembled regular rifle companies in organization and equipment. The province chief had wide latitude in the employment of RF, which had a correspondingly wide impact on the way in which the RF were employed from province to province. In some provinces, an RF cadre was assigned to districts and provided some of the key staff for the district chief.⁸⁶ Other districts had no RF assigned at all, as they were reserved for province level operations.

An example of the ratio between PF platoons and RF companies is found in the post-tour debrief of LTC Gerald Bartlett, PSA for Hau Nghia Province in 1971-72, where 117 PF platoons were available to districts and villages and 33 RF companies were available to the Province Chief. In this Province, RF were used in rural areas, outside of the districts and villages protected by PF and others.⁸⁷ As with PF, the biggest impediment to RF effectiveness was poor leadership and corruption. Together, RF/PF were considered, “the backbone of Territorial Security and constitute[d] approximately one-half of the manpower in the Vietnamese Armed Forces.”⁸⁸

Developed to provide additional manpower for village security, Peoples' Self Defense Forces (PSDF), "were part-time soldiers, older men -- essentially retired veterans called up as needed."⁸⁹ In an ideal village, all able-bodied men not otherwise in service would be part of the PSDF. Rudimentary training was provided by the PF, by advisors, or by RD Cadres. For example, in late 1969 and early 1970 in Phong Dien and Huong Dien Districts, Phong Dinh Province, PSDF received 51 hours of training from RD cadres.⁹⁰ PSDF were usually employed in static security missions, manning observation posts, village gates and other similar positions.⁹¹ Armed to various levels depending on many factors, PSDF worked for the district chief. PSDF were generally more effective in pacified areas, where they were less prone to infiltration or cooptation by VC.⁹²

District police included regular police responsible for basic civil order and plain clothes Special Branch officers responsible for intelligence collection. By policy, police also had the lead for operations to counter VC infrastructure (VCI), the insurgent shadow government. The district town was also supposed to have an element of the National Police Field Force (NPFF) as a sort of reaction force and DIOCC action force.⁹³ In practice, the police presence amounted to a village station with 2 or 3 policemen and a slightly larger presence, 15 by one estimate, in the district center.⁹⁴ Widely seen as ineffective, the police suffered from inadequate resources, inexperienced advisor support, and the same corruption challenges suffered by other local security elements.⁹⁵

Revolutionary Development Cadres were 30 man teams assigned to targeted districts to instigate political change. In addition to helping establish PSDF, RD Cadres were to educate the population on their role in Government as well as initiate political and economic reforms.⁹⁶ Their specific remit was to establish the following processes: identify the VC infrastructure;

organize and train People's Self Defense Forces; organize the elections of local officials; start the implementation of self-help programs.⁹⁷ RD teams were under the cognizance of the province chief, but when assigned to work in a given village or district were responsible to the district chief and advised by the DSA.⁹⁸ In 1969, there were about 1400 teams throughout South Vietnam.⁹⁹ While teams were relatively well regarded by leadership at the regional level and above, many DSAs never saw them and others found them ineffective at best, counterproductive at worst.

In theory, district chiefs and their DSAs had a unified, multifaceted civilian-military organization with which to maintain law and order, root out insurgents, and protect the district and its villages and hamlets from attack. In practice, the quality of forces varied widely, and was, not surprisingly, highly influenced by the quality of its leadership. Some forces, PSDF in some locations, the NP in many locations, were inadequately resourced. Corruption beginning at the top levels of government negatively influenced their ability to make things better. However, many district chiefs were able to leverage their personal charisma, legal authority, and additional capabilities provided through the DSA and the district advisor team to improve the quality of life for people in their district.

Despite many challenges, including those presented by ever present high level plans, operations at the district level were ultimately governed by simple guidance, “win the war, do good and avoid evil.”¹⁰⁰ According to DSA Peter Tomsen,

all of these [local] forces rose above the corruption of the Saigon regime, beginning with the generals around Thieu, plus their wives, whose methods of extraction of resources from the local population went down to the company level, and higher officers stooped to stealing the salary of their soldiers. Local and above elections were a farce. Still, the political negatives of the VC/DRV far outweighed the political negatives of the Thieu regime.¹⁰¹

OPERATIONS AND INTELLIGENCE

By 1969, most of the leadership in South Vietnam recognized that main force VC and NVA units in South Vietnam had been severely weakened, and in some cases, totally destroyed by fighting during and after the Tet Offensive in 1968. However, despite predictions that ARVN units, and American units for that matter, would play a larger role in pacification activities in the future, many districts continued to conduct local counterinsurgency without calling on conventional units.¹⁰² At the center of this were the district advisor teams, under the single civilian-military CORDS chain of command.¹⁰³ While CORDS goals included non-security specific development tasks, and DSAs did execute some smaller economic improvement programs, the majority of the DSA's time was spent working to improve security in the district.

The district team, both by design and because of close working quarters, provides an excellent example of operations and intelligence fusion at the tactical level. The vast majority of useful information came from informants within the district or province, though sometimes the collected information was passed through the advisor chain. The type and abilities of forces in the districts, combined with nuances of local culture, meant the Vietnamese had to be in the lead on intelligence and operations activities. The DIOCC and its relationship to the *Phung Hoang* program were important early components of district activities, but were less of a focus as the regular district security structure absorbed anti-VC infrastructure tasks. The most important asset brought to the district by the DSA and district team, especially by 1971, was access to American resources and infrastructure. This included artillery, naval gun fire, supplies, air strikes, and most importantly, helicopter medical evacuation capabilities. Political actions and most local security operations were well within the capabilities of district forces.¹⁰⁴

Security operations always included some aspect of intelligence, either as the reason for the operation in the first place, or as a product of an operation. When operations were not initiated solely to gather intelligence, it was a welcome byproduct. One particularly useful tactic was conducting an obvious unit sweep through an area in which VC were known to operate, then leaving an ambush squad behind to attack the VC when they came to inspect the swept area.¹⁰⁵

Almost universally, the best intelligence came from the Vietnamese, either through informant networks, including former VC who “rallied” to the South Vietnamese under the *Chieu Hoi* program¹⁰⁶ or through work by some of the better RF or PF units. As the DSA and his team were totally integrated with the district forces, communication with the district’s Vietnamese intelligence officer, usually a lieutenant, and operations officer, usually a captain, was good. Coordination between elements was highly informal. This was due to several reasons, chief among them the complexities of Vietnamese culture, the desire to avoid time lost through use of formal channels, and the belief that VC agents were embedded throughout the political and economic structure of the district.¹⁰⁷ The district team’s Vietnamese counterparts had informants throughout the district and province. Americans usually lacked the language skills, ability to blend in, and in depth understanding of the local environment to effectively conduct intelligence operations using human sources. As one DSA put it, “my S2 was very good but a six foot tall American handing out money to shadowy Vietnamese villagers coming to the hooch or nearby was not very useful, aside from, in my opinion, enriching the payee who could have been working for the other side.”¹⁰⁸ Another DSA was even more succinct, “The only intelligence we got was from our Vietnamese counterparts.”¹⁰⁹

Where districts did receive information from Americans, it was usually through personal contact. Secure communications were not available to most DSAs. In areas where the

provincial capital was easily accessible by road or air, district team members would meet daily or weekly with the province team. In these cases, information was exchanged with the district team usually providing more than they were provided. This was especially true for exchanges with the CIA. The CIA maintained offices at the province level in what was usually called the “province house,” not to be confused with the CORDS province team building which was called, “team house,” and was separate from the province house. CIA officers did spend time at the Team House, but rarely travelled to the DSA “hooch” in the district town. In any case, the CIA left the impression that they were, relative to the district team, getting more than they were giving.¹¹⁰ One area where American intelligence resources did outperform their Vietnamese counterparts was in signals intelligence. Here, relevant information was provided to the DSA through the PSA and the military region headquarters.¹¹¹

While many districts did receive some intelligence from American sources, and certainly through American channels, the nature of the environment severely restricted the utility of American technical intelligence capabilities. The environment also shaped the access and perceptions of Vietnamese. In many cases districts did not contain homogenous populations of Buddhist Vietnamese. In addition to large Catholic populations, a legacy of the French, Buddhist Hoa Haos, Chinese, Cambodians, and Montagnards all largely rejected communism and hated the Viet Cong. These subcultures, in addition to most mainstream Vietnamese in rural areas, were traditional and conservative. They did not necessarily understand and did not welcome the change proposed by Ho Chi Minh and the communists. Perception was also shaped by presence of the competing parties. Where American forces were able to gain access and provide resources to help improve the standard of living, they were welcomed and the Saigon government was accepted.¹¹²

Though the nature of the district team and the village environment led DSAs and their Vietnamese counterparts to integration of operations and intelligence, there was a formal mechanism designed to facilitate this. Called the district intelligence and operations coordination center (DIOCC) at the district level and provincial intelligence operations center (PIOCC) at the province level, this was a physical location where the National *Phung Hoang*, or Phoenix, plan was carried out. Phoenix was not an organization or unit. It was a plan to collect information on, then target, Viet Cong political infrastructure in the South.¹¹³ Advisors at all levels of government had some role in *Phung Hoang*, even though it was limited to ensuring team members understood the program and their role, however small, in it.¹¹⁴ Between 1968 and 1970, the program had been a major CORDS effort, and several hundred U. S. Army intelligence officers were assigned as Phoenix advisors, working for the DSA in the DIOCC. Essentially, Phoenix advisors helped their Vietnamese counterparts improve record keeping and build dossiers on VC shadow government figures.¹¹⁵ When there was a DIOCC, the intelligence effort for a conventional US battalion operating closely with a district advising team was centered on the collection and products provided by the Vietnamese through the DIOCC.¹¹⁶

Over time, the DIOCCs worked themselves out of business. A military intelligence officer assigned to Vietnam as a Phoenix advisor in 1971 found that the centers were no longer required and that the Vietnamese had more or less integrated VC infrastructure targeting into their day to day operations. The Vietnamese had developed to the point where they had fused intelligence and operations without having to try.¹¹⁷ Without the DIOCC, no one member of a district advising team was necessarily responsible for intelligence. The senior members of the staff, basically everybody except the medic and the radio operator, worked the intelligence portfolio.¹¹⁸

The district government and district advising team developed, through need and situation as much as through formal direction, an effective tactical operations and intelligence integration effort. In the early years of the CORDS program, DIOCCs were useful coordination centers in establishing procedures to counter VC infrastructure, but these centers were unnecessary as Vietnamese security forces matured. As is often the case in counterinsurgency, the best sources of intelligence were local informants. This was further shaped by the many cultural and societal fault lines within Vietnam. Successful foreign intelligence officers had to remain one or two levels removed from intelligence collection work, letting their Vietnamese counterparts run sources.

DEVELOPMENT

While security concerns dominated the schedules of most district chiefs and DSAs, they were also responsible for economic and political development in the district. Most of the projects available to the DSA were very small scale. Large scale projects were coordinated by CORDS, but through the headquarters in Saigon.¹¹⁹ Development projects might include basic repairs to unimproved roads, building small facilities for district government use, or agricultural development projects like improved pig husbandry.¹²⁰ Some of the more enterprising Vietnamese and Americans took advantage of whatever was available to improve the standard of living for their areas. The follow on impact of even small projects could be quite significant.¹²¹

District advisor teams also provided extensive medical support to their districts. In addition to the potential for medical evacuation by helicopter, the team medic often provided villagers their only regular access to western medicine. In some districts, medical teams from nearby American bases would occasionally visit and provide service beyond the capabilities of

the medic. However, the simplest things sometimes had the largest impact. One advisor lamented that most villagers lacked access to basic hygiene materials like soap.¹²²

Political development was another matter. While DSAs could and did provide advice to the district chief, political considerations were especially subject to factors beyond the understanding or influence of the DSA. This was especially true as the South Vietnamese government was basically run through the military under a military chain of command. Revolutionary Development Cadres were responsible for introducing some political changes, but the established district and province chiefs, usually personally connected to the Saigon leadership and almost always extremely powerful, controlled most aspects of political life. This was not necessarily permanent, but any plan to transition the military out of direct government was unlikely to be implemented until after the war.¹²³

COMMAND AND CONTROL AND COUNTERPART RELATIONSHIPS

DSAs had two critical relationships in the performance of their duties. The first was with the PSA, who had to trust that the DSA would make the right decisions with very little oversight. The second, and more critical, was the relationship between the DSA and the district chief. All success at the district was derived strictly through the success of the counterpart. Advisor teams had no successes of their own.

In CORDS, DSAs were largely left to figure things out on their own. Very few things required asking higher headquarters for permission, including approval for air strikes or other fires. Occasionally, specific requirements relative to measures of performance or instructions for dealing with a particularly corrupt official came through official traffic. Some provinces held a monthly conference where district chiefs and DSAs would get together and receive updates on various trends and new requirements. A useful addition to these meetings was the opportunity to

discuss events with other DSAs. Through this method, best practices were spread.¹²⁴ But specific discussion of goals and objectives was uncommon. Visits by the PSA or other leadership to the outlying districts were uncommon, though some leaders were known to make frequent surprise visits around their areas. John Vann, at one point the senior CORDS advisor to Military Region (MR) IV, would discuss his approach to the war with his subordinates – military and civilian alike - over drinks in his quarters. His guidance generally did not extend beyond warning advisors not to be surprised that if the Americans insisted on fighting the war for, rather than with, the Vietnamese that the Vietnamese would let them. Exact methods for fighting with, rather than for, the Vietnamese were left up to the DSAs who were most knowledgeable as to the circumstances of the district they worked in.¹²⁵ This entailed an incredible amount of responsibility and freedom of action, well beyond that of most other officers or civilians.

Much more than guidance from the PSA or other senior Americans, success or failure in each district depended on the varied quality of the Vietnamese district chief. District chiefs were powerful. Appointed and commanded by the Province chief, with the concurrence of the President of South Vietnam, they were usually well connected to more senior levels of the government. The DSA and other team members spent time together on and off duty. Often, Vietnamese would invite their American counterparts to dinner at their homes. These dinners were extremely useful in determining how successful the DSA and his team were, much more so than the more formal evaluation systems used by the CORDS program. Memoirs of more than one DSA are thick with recollections of long nights spent drinking cognac or beer with their district chief or other officers on his staff.¹²⁶ During dinner together, “DSAs were especially vulnerable to requests from numerous Vietnamese officers of all ranks to raise their glass of Hennessy and down it, looking straight at the one asking you to drink with him.”¹²⁷ An

important component of Vietnamese culture in that era, the frequency and conviviality of these exchanges served as a sort of barometer that allowed the DSA to gauge the depth of his relationship with the Vietnamese.

When the relationship was good, advisors and counterparts were almost never far away from each other. DSAs and their district chiefs traveled throughout the district together. When the chief was indisposed, the DSA might travel with the deputy district chief. This required strong personal relationships and a great deal of trust, a prerequisite for any successful advising effort in Vietnam. As put by William Colby when testifying before the Senate during his time as DEPCORDS,

Because it is the relationship with the Vietnamese which will decide whether the program will work or fail, it cannot be American. Americans can assist the Vietnamese temporarily and can help them take over the full program. Our resources are important. Our imagination and our energy are also important. But we must address these to helping Vietnamese to do the job themselves.¹²⁸

ASSESSMENTS

No discussion of any aspect of CORDS is complete without mentioning the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES). Complete with a 100 page handbook, HES was a time consuming project that required DSAs to gather statistics and complete “updating cards” and “ledger forms” and submit them to the PSA each month. PSAs consolidated reports and sent them to the regional headquarters. The regional headquarters would then forward the reports to the CORDS directorate in Saigon responsible for compiling and analyzing the data.¹²⁹ After analyzing the data, CORDS officials in Saigon could create any number of charts or spreadsheets that were supposed to explain how the war was going. The most recognizable end product was a grade of A, B, or C. An A indicated that the hamlet was under the complete control of the government, a B less so, and a C even worse.¹³⁰ DSAs generally thought the system was totally ineffective in

gauging the district situation. One DSA explained that common practice was to lower your predecessor's grades as soon as you took over, and then gradually raise them up.¹³¹

Not all saw HES as useless. Some American units operating in nearby areas followed evaluation reports closely. They acknowledged that the system was imperfect, but considered it the only "statistical means available for gauging hamlet improvement."¹³² Others believed that, though they were inaccurate, HES rankings did provide a way to track trends. The reports could also be useful for discussing events and aspirations for the district.¹³³ This could have negative impacts, as well. In a 1977 monograph written for the Center of Military History, Vietnamese Brig. Gen. Tran Dinh Tho, wrote, "Despite impressive statistics, the figures were often misleading. They frequently served a political purpose and did not reflect realistic gains."¹³⁴

CONCLUSION

CORDS represented a unique approach to counterinsurgency and pacification. Conducted in the shadow of a big unit war, it was an exceptional combination of military and civilian power under a single civilian coordinator inside a military organization. The approach worked. By the end of active American involvement in the war in 1972, the guerilla war for rural Vietnam had essentially been won by the South Vietnamese. While the war was certainly lost in the end, it was at the hands of conventional North Vietnamese Army units in large scale offensives launched from across the northern border.¹³⁵ This is not to say that there were no insurgents left at all. Rather, the infrastructure had been so decimated that the economy and people of the South, especially in the Mekong Delta, were relatively prosperous and supportive of the central government.

Ultimately this was made possible by the success of Vietnamese administrators, soldiers, and policemen at the district and village level. From the American side, however, the district

senior advisor and his team were the critical link. DSAs represented American support for the GVN. More than that, they brought military and non-military resources to rural Vietnam. Great innovation in the application of resources led to exceptional fusion of operations and intelligence that maximized the use of local sources, despite relatively poor police and police intelligence capabilities. DSAs cultivated close relationships with their counterparts, often securing their trust. This allowed the U. S. Government to influence the progress of the “other war” at the critical district level.

CORDS was designed to provide what would today be called an interagency approach to counterinsurgency. Designed to work at all levels from Saigon down to all of the nearly 250 districts, the district advisor team represented the furthest reach of the American advisory effort in Vietnam. Unfortunately, the ultimate loss of the Vietnam War, coupled with the fact that CORDS was a relatively small effort compared to the overall size of the war, has kept this success from being more widely known.

MAPS AND FIGURES

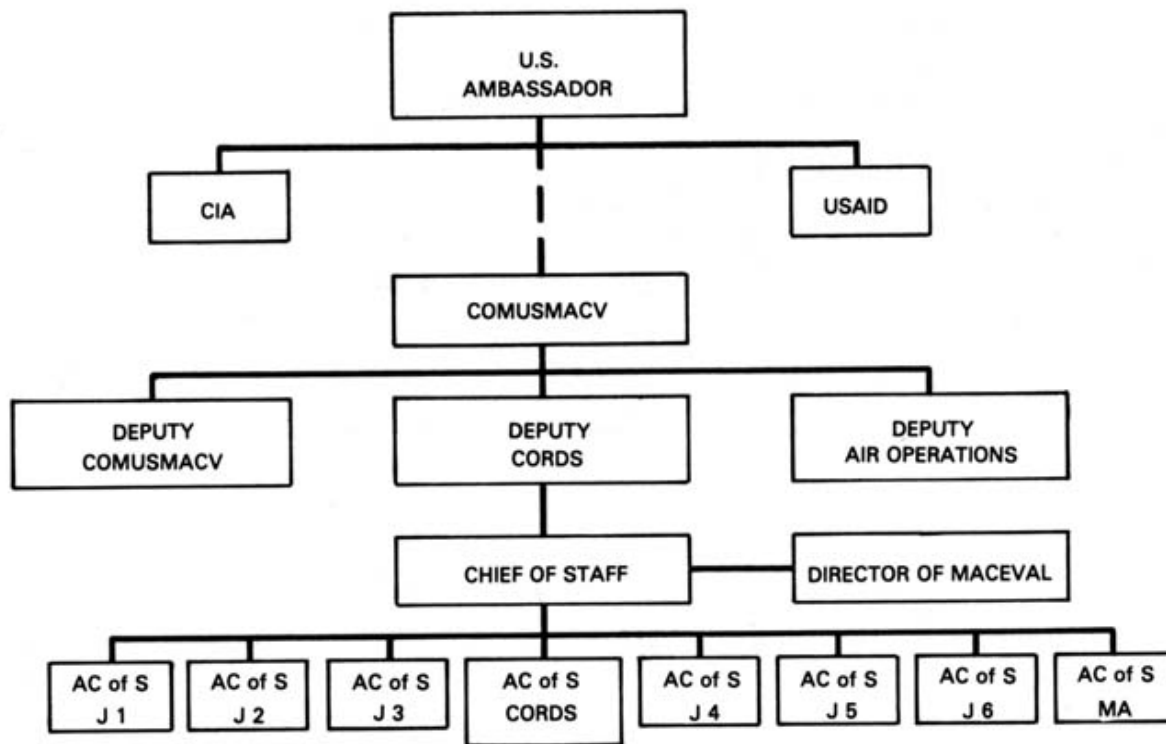


Figure 1: Senior U.S. Government Leadership in Vietnam¹³⁶

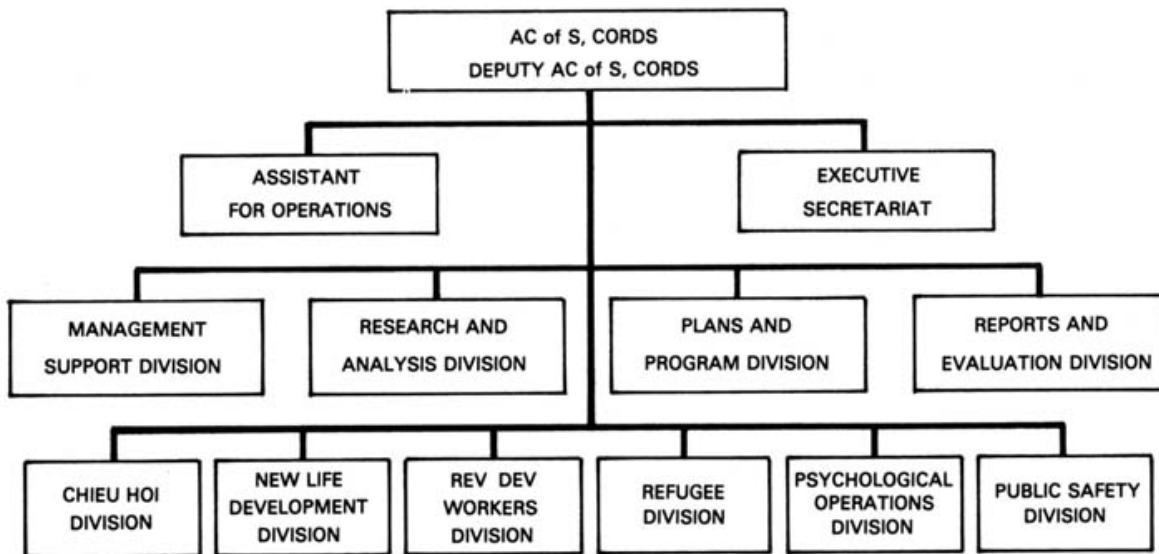


Figure 2: Organization of AC/S CORDS¹³⁷

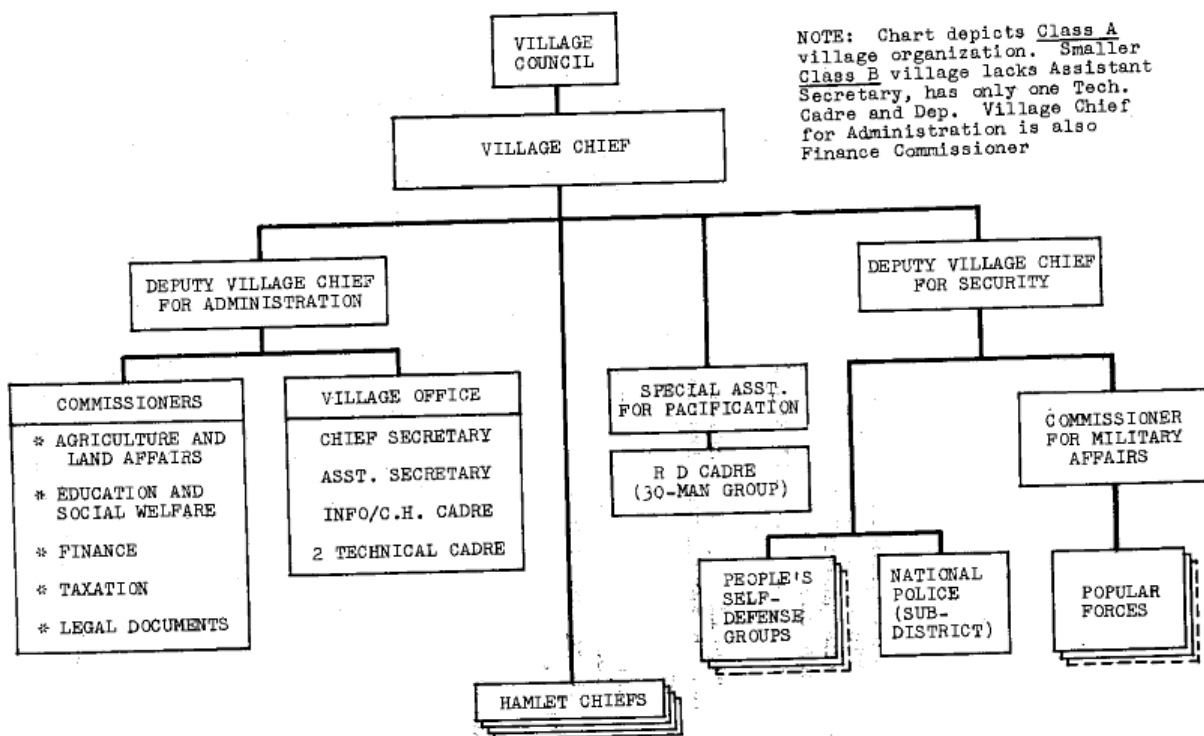


Figure 3: Village Government Organization¹³⁸

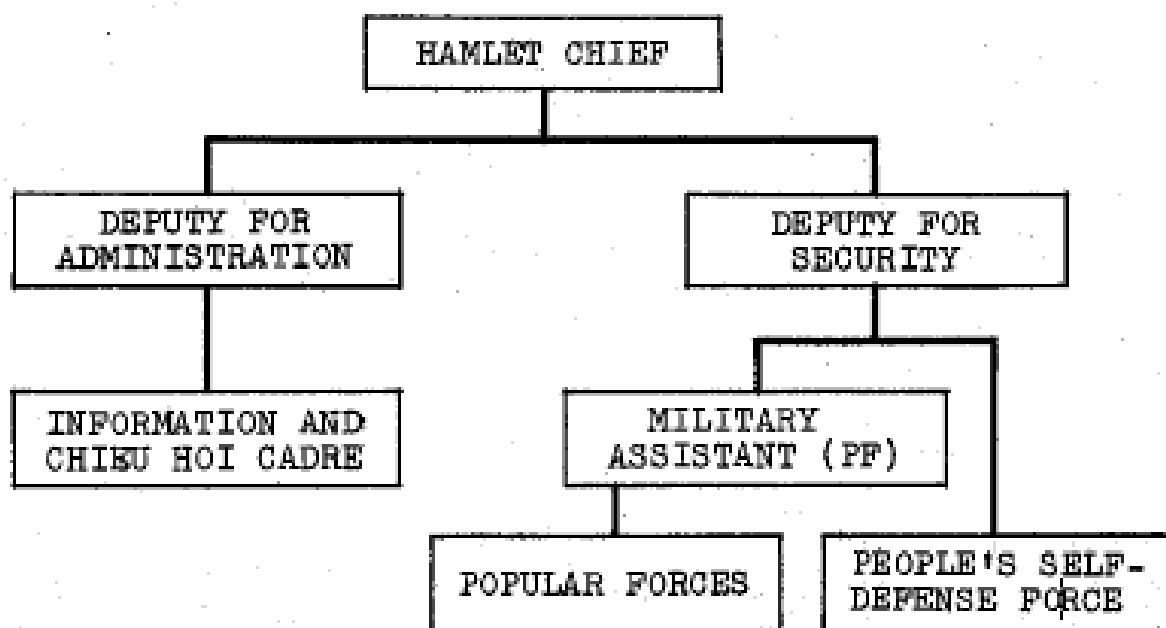


Figure 4: Hamlet Government Organization¹³⁹

<u>DISTRICT ADVISORY TEAM</u>					
<u>DISTRICT TEAM</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>GRADE</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>
District Adv	G2162	O4	1	1	1
Asst District Adv	G2162	O3	1	1	0
Medical Adv	91B4H	E7	1	1	1
Ops/Intel Adv	11F4H	E7	1	1	0
Wld/Hum Acty Adv	11B4H	E7	1	1	1
Community/EO Adv	12B4H	E6	1	0	0
Radio Op	O5B4O	E5	1	1	1
Facility Coord	9301	O3	1	1	1
<u>M&S</u>					
Sr Adv	G2520	O3			
Asst Adv	G2520	O2			
Lt Wpn Inf Adv	11B4H	E7			
Medical Adv	91B4H	E7			
Hvy Wpn Inf Adv	11C4H	E7			

Figure 5: Table of Organization, District Advisor Team, 1970¹⁴⁰

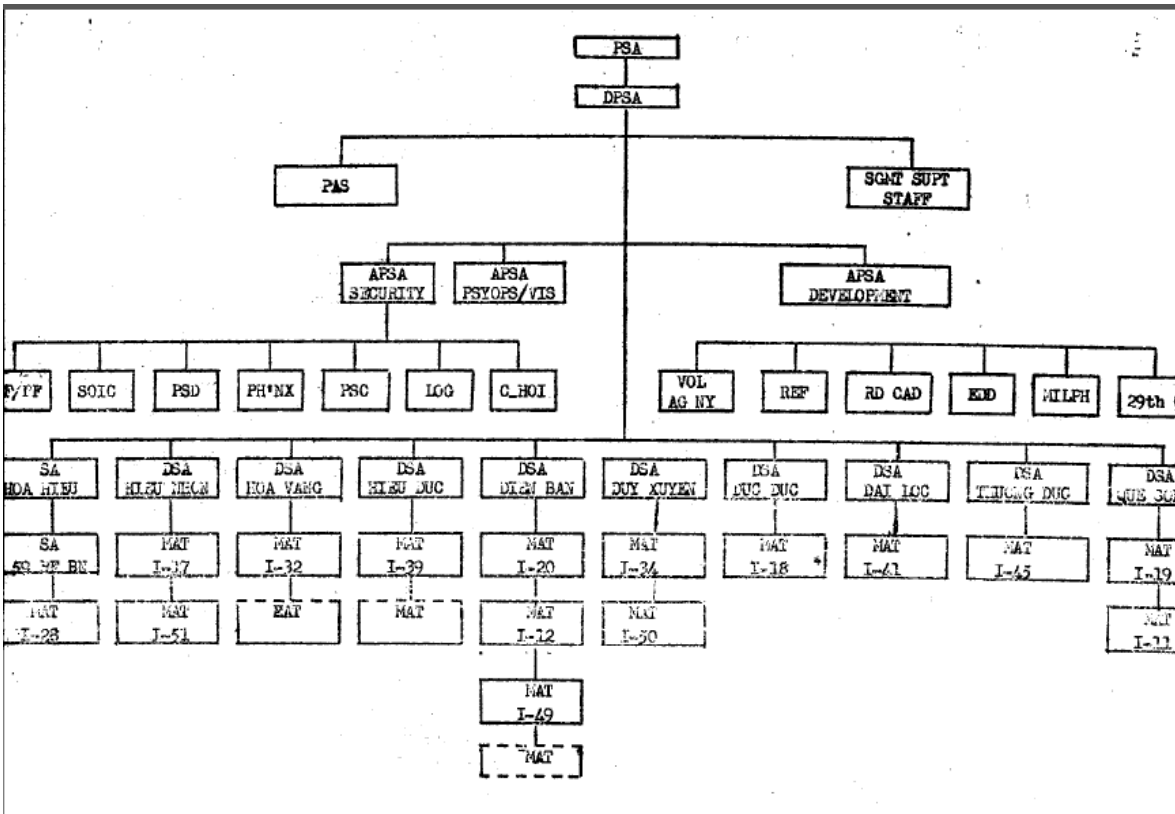


Figure 6: Province Advisory Team, Quang Nam Province, 1970¹⁴¹

Notes or Citations

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- ¹ (United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Assistant Chief of Staff for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support 1969, 2)
- ² (Truong 1980, 175)
- ³ (Thayer 1985, 135)
- ⁴ (Tzu 1971, 47)
- ⁵ (Colby, The Virtual Vietnam Center and Archive at Texas Tech University Interview with William Colby 1981, 24) The first widely acknowledged named program was the *Agroville* effort of the late 1950s. President Diem envisioned the program as a kind of reorientation to agriculture population centers made possible, and somewhat necessary, by the proliferation of planned new roads, bridges, canals and other infrastructure. This program, like many of the later Vietnamese programs, was primarily focused on the rice growing regions in the Mekong Delta.
- ⁶ (United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Assistant Chief of Staff for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support 1969, 3)
- ⁷ (Komer 1972, 132)
- ⁸ (Colby 1981, 4-5)
- ⁹ (Colby 1989, 99)
- ¹⁰ (Colby 1989, 100)
- ¹¹ (Phillips 1962, 5-6)
- ¹² (Phillips 1962, 22)
- ¹³ (Phillips 1962, 22)
- ¹⁴ (Scoville 1982, 6)
- ¹⁵ (Office of Rural Affairs, United States Operations Mission, Saigon 1963, 6-7)
- ¹⁶ (Colby 1989, 164)
- ¹⁷ (Halberstam 1963)
- ¹⁸ (Hamlet in Vietnam Is at Mercy of Red Guerrillas 1964)
- ¹⁹ (Westmoreland 1976, 84)
- ²⁰ (Komer 1972, 133)
- ²¹ (Colby 1989, 164-165)
- ²² (Colby 1981, 46)
- ²³ Diem had maintained power primarily through the Catholic elite, a legacy of the French. In addition to their religion, many of the elites shared a Northern heritage and had relocated to the South when Vietnam was divided at the end of the colonial era. The population itself was also rather varied. In urban areas, a Chinese Diaspora maintained extensive business interests. The Highlands included Montagnard, and Lao communities. The Delta had a sizeable Khmer population. In addition to ethnic minorities, various religious sects existed throughout South Vietnam, including the Hao Hao and Cao Dai.
- ²⁴ (Nighswonger 1966, 87)
- ²⁵ (Pearce 1965, 18) The five steps: military operations to clear the area of enemy, building New Rural Life hamlets in the cleared area, deployment of pacification teams focused on improving local government and initiating economic projects, creation of a local self-defense capability coordinated with the army, and organization of civic institutions. The six criteria: census taken and insurgent infrastructure destroyed, hamlet defense force established, construction of hamlet defensive works, established communications with higher headquarters to enable reinforcement, organization of the population in age groups to support defense activities, hamlet administration committee elected or appointed.
- ²⁶ (Pearce 1965, 18-19)
- ²⁷ (Nighswonger 1966, 150-161)
- ²⁸ (Montague 1966, ii, 16)
- ²⁹ (Intelligence and Reporting Subcommittee of the of the Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee 1965, 5)
- ³⁰ (Nighswonger 1966, 88) At the end of 1965, there were approximately 600,000 Vietnamese in the Nation's security forces. Of those, about half were from the various non-Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) elements. At about the same time, there were fewer than 10,000 personnel in the entire advisory effort, of which 8500 were military, 800 from USAID, and another 150 in the Joint US Public Affairs Office
- ³¹ (Intelligence and Reporting Subcommittee of the Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee 1965, 5-7)
- ³² (Scoville 1982, 16)
- ³³ (Komer 1972, 137)

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- ³⁴ “William Porter, 73, U.S. Delegate At Vietnam Peace Talks, Is Dead.” *The New York Times*. March 17, 1988. <http://www.nytimes.com/1988/03/17/obituaries/william-porter-73-us-delegate-at-vietnam-peace-talks-is-dead.html> (accessed February 6, 2012).
- ³⁵ (Komer, Organization and Management of the "New Model" Pacification Program -- 1966-1969 1970, 25-26)
- ³⁶ (Westmoreland 1976, 210-211)
- ³⁷ (United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Assistant Chief of Staff for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support 1969, 5)
- ³⁸ (Komer, Organization and Management of the "New Model" Pacification Program -- 1966-1969 1970, 52-53)
- ³⁹ (Colby 1981, 42-43)
- ⁴⁰ Hall, James. E-mail to William Osborne, December 31, 2011.
- ⁴¹ Hall, James. E-mail to William Osborne, December 31, 2011.
- ⁴² (United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Assistant Chief of Staff for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support 1969, 5)
- ⁴³ (United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Assistant Chief of Staff for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support 1969, 6,10, 12, 14, 15, 16)
- ⁴⁴ (Colby 1981, 29) Colby contends that the Strategic Hamlet Program was focused on the hamlet because that was the lowest plausible political entity. Ngu had favored this because he was interested in remaking almost the entire model of the government.
- ⁴⁵ (Colby 1989, 238) “The important result of the evening [a visit to a Vietnamese village], however, was a clear understanding between [John Paul] Vann and myself that the real way we should be fighting the war was by building communities such as the one we visited, and gradually pressing the Communists away from the population.”
- ⁴⁶ Hall, James. E-mail to William Osborne, December 31, 2011.
- ⁴⁷ (91st Congress, 2nd Session, 10)
- ⁴⁸ (Cook 1997, 251-254)
- ⁴⁹ (91st Congress, 2nd Session 1970, 10)
- ⁵⁰ Tomsen, Peter. E-mail to William Osborne, January 3, 2012
- ⁵¹ Hall, James. E-mail to William Osborne, December 31, 2011
- ⁵² Tomsen, Peter. E-mail to William Osborne, January 3, 2012
- ⁵³ Hall, James. E-mail to William Osborne, December 31, 2011 and Tomsen, Peter. E-mail to William Osborne, January 3, 2012
- ⁵⁴ (Komer, Organization and Management of the "New Model" Pacification Program -- 1966-1969 1970, 211-215)
- ⁵⁵ (Komer, Organization and Management of the "New Model" Pacification Program -- 1966-1969 1970, 212)
- ⁵⁶ (91st Congress, 2nd Session 1970, 10)
- ⁵⁷ Hall, James. E-mail to William Osborne, December 31, 2011.
- ⁵⁸ Tomsen, Peter. E-mail to William Osborne, January 3, 2012.
- ⁵⁹ Tomsen, Peter. E-mail to William Osborne, January 3, 2012.
- ⁶⁰ Hall, James. E-mail to William Osborne, December 31, 2011.
- ⁶¹ (Ngo 1980, 170)
- ⁶² (Graham 1969, 40-41) Graham quotes course cards for each of the four Special Warfare Center courses.
- ⁶³ (92nd Congress, 1st Session 1971, 227)
- ⁶⁴ Hall, James. E-mail to William Osborne, December 31, 2011.
- ⁶⁵ Hall, James. E-mail to William Osborne, December 31, 2011.
- ⁶⁶ (Department of the Army, Office of the Adjutant General 1972, 3)
- ⁶⁷ Hall, James. E-mail to William Osborne, December 31, 2011. Tomsen, Peter. E-mail to William Osborne, January 3, 2012
- ⁶⁸ (Foreign Service Institute, Vietnam Training Center 1969)
- ⁶⁹ Tomsen, Peter. E-mail to William Osborne, January 3, 2012. “We called in air support as needed by communicating by radio with aircraft and helicopter gunships flying out of Soc Trang air base in Ba Xuyen. Once, when an outpost under VC attack adjacent to a VC infested jungle area on the southern rim of our district was under attack I desperately contacted a Coast Guard vessel in South China Sea waters just off the coast for support. Their fire support was immensely impressive. It landed directly on the coordinates near the outpost I gave them.”
- ⁷⁰ Tomsen, Peter. E-mail to William Osborne, January 3, 2012
- ⁷¹ Tomsen, Peter. E-mail to William Osborne, January 3, 2012

⁷² (United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Assistant Chief of Staff for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support 1971, 17-19)

⁷³ (Province Senior Advisor, Quang Nam Province, Republic of Vietnam 1970, 5)

⁷⁴ (91st Congress, 2nd Session 1970, 10)

⁷⁵ (Donovan 1986) David Donovan is the pen name of Terry Turner. He spent a year (1969-1970) as MAT advisor in Tram Chim Village, Dong Tien district, Kien Phong province.

⁷⁶ Tomsen, Peter. E-mail to William Osborne, January 3, 2012

⁷⁷ Hall, James. E-mail to William Osborne, December 31, 2011. "ARVN troops in the District were under control of their respective division commanders: the 9th (HQd in Sadec) for Duc Ton and the 21st (HQd in Bac Lieu) in Phong Phu. Their numbers varied depending on circumstances. (The 9th was more interested in nearby Duc Ton, site of an NVA base at "The Y," than the 21st was interested in more distant Phong Phu.)"

⁷⁸ (United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam 1968, 22)

⁷⁹ (United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Assistant Chief of Staff for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support 1971, 35-37)

⁸⁰ Hall, James. Interview by William Osborne in person. Bethesda, MD. January 2, 2012.

⁸¹ (United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Assistant Chief of Staff for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support 1971, 57-62)

⁸² (Haseman 2000, 45-46)

⁸³ (Headquarters, Advisory Team 72 (Vinh Binh Province), Delta Regional Assistance Command 1973, 5-7)

⁸⁴ (United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Assistant Chief of Staff for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support 1971, 51-52). In 1971 the basic course was six weeks and advanced individual training was six weeks. The courses normally ran concurrently.

⁸⁵ (United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Assistant Chief of Staff for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support 1971, 35)

⁸⁶ Hall, James. E-mail to William Osborne, December 31, 2011. "Regional Forces (RF) were under control of the Province Chief. A regular RF cadre of about 15 officers and troops was detailed to the district HQ and seconded to control of the District Chief. (These included the Deputy District Chief for Security (a Captain) his S2, S3 and S4 (all lieutenants) an adjutant (an Aspirant, i.e., cadet officer) and a District Sergeant Major and other NCOs including the NCOs in charge of the crew of the two howitzers in Duc Ton. Two or three RF troops were assigned to each of about 15 village outposts. Additional RF would be sent into the district and seconded to the District Chief as temporary circumstances warranted."

⁸⁷ (Department of the Army, Office of the Adjutant General 1972, 7)

⁸⁸ (United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Assistant Chief of Staff for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support 1969, 6)

⁸⁹ Hall, James. E-mail to William Osborne, December 31, 2011.

⁹⁰ (3d Battalion, 187th Infantry 1970)

⁹¹ (United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Assistant Chief of Staff for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support 1970, 61)

⁹² (Headquarters, Advisory Team 72 (Vinh Binh Province), Delta Regional Assistance Command 1973, 10)

⁹³ (United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Assistant Chief of Staff for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support 1971, 31)

⁹⁴ Hall, James. E-mail to William Osborne, December 31, 2011.

⁹⁵ (Komer, Organization and Management of the "New Model" Pacification Program -- 1966-1969 1970)

⁹⁶ (United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam 1968, 17)

⁹⁷ (United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Assistant Chief of Staff for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support 1969, 12)

⁹⁸ (Province Senior Advisor, Quang Nam Province, Republic of Vietnam 1970, 16)

⁹⁹ (United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Assistant Chief of Staff for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support 1970, 65)

¹⁰⁰ Hall, James. E-mail to William Osborne, December 31, 2011. James Hall, in response to a question about established goals and direction from higher headquarters to DSAs, "Goal was to win the war, do good and avoid evil. How to do this was pretty much left to DSAs who as the most knowledgeable people on local circumstances were considered the best qualified. There was rarely if ever any discussion of goals and objectives. Over drinks at his house in Can Tho (one of a couple dozen pre-fab houses in a compound called Palm Springs, occupied by Region (i.e. IV Corps) and Provincial advisors, John Vann would occasionally philosophize on his approach to the

war, the major theme of which was that if we insisted on fighting the war for (as opposed to with) our Vietnamese allies, we shouldn't be surprised if they let us do so."

¹⁰¹ Tomsen, Peter. E-mail to William Osborne, January 3, 2012.

¹⁰² Hall, James. Interview by William Osborne in person. Bethesda, MD. January 2, 2012. There was an area between the Mekong and Bassac Rivers called the "Y" that was an NVA base. It was on an infiltration route from Cambodia. Clearing it would have required a major decision from Washington or Saigon to do so. Later in the war, the infiltration route through the Plain of Reeds was blocked. The "Y" was not.

¹⁰³ (United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Assistant Chief of Staff for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support 1969, 17)

¹⁰⁴ (Haseman 2000, 54)

¹⁰⁵ Tomsen, Peter. E-mail to William Osborne, January 3, 2012.

¹⁰⁶ (Komer, Organization and Management of the "New Model" Pacification Program -- 1966-1969 1970, 172) Run through the local government, *Chieu Hoi* was a low cost, effective way to bring insurgents back into government. Robert Komer, the first DEPCORDS, called it, "one of the most successful little programs in Vietnam." Under the program, more than 140,000 former VC members came back to the Government between 1963 and 1970.

¹⁰⁷ (Tomsen 2012) "We assumed scattered VC agents were embedded in the bureaucracy and may have been listening in on all of our communications -one time pads were essential. After Saigon fell, I heard that the young lady Vietnamese cashier at the embassy was a VC military officer. This necessitated informal communications and close coordination in discreet channels."

¹⁰⁸ (Tomsen 2012) Tomsen expounded, "our intel on the enemy and his movements came mainly covertly to the District Chief and his staff from Vietnamese eyes and ears in the district, from village and hamlet officials to VSDF members, to trusted peasants, Revolutionary Development Cadre to, in other words, those Vietnamese eyewitnesses closest to the action on the ground.

¹⁰⁹ (Haseman 2000, 45)

¹¹⁰ Hall, James. E-mail to William Osborne, December 31, 2011.

¹¹¹ Tomsen, Peter. E-mail to William Osborne, January 3, 2012.

¹¹² Hall, James. E-mail to William Osborne, December 31, 2011, Tomsen, Peter. E-mail to William Osborne, January 3, 2012. Both documents discuss, at some length, the views of the locals toward the VC, the Americans, and the Saigon government. Basically, locals did not like the change proposed by the VC even though they largely had no understanding of communism. The Saigon government also was not well liked, but Americans were. People seemed to accept the Saigon government as the better of the two alternatives, especially when it came with American largess.

¹¹³ (United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Assistant Chief of Staff for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support 1969, 10) "The attack on the enemy infrastructure is a most important program in the clearing and security phases of pacification. This Vietnamese program provides a combined system of GVN/US intelligence gathering and collating agencies from the national level down through corps, province and district levels. The information gathered serves to identify hard-core communists and VC agents operating at all levels of the insurgency. Once identified they are targeted by action forces and killed, captured, or rallied with the objective of eliminating VC influence over the local population and denying important assistance to VC /NVA military forces. The most important sub-programs in eliminating the VC infrastructure are: PHUNG HOANG/PHOENIX: The framework for attacking the VCI is called Phung Hoang by the Vietnamese and Phoenix by the U.S. This organization consists of coordinating committees down to the province level. The operational elements are the Provincial or District Intelligence and Operations Coordination centers (PIOCC/DIOCC). These centers normally consist of representatives from the various military, paramilitary and GVN civilian agencies operating within the province and district responsible to the province and district chiefs. The primary goal of these centers is exploiting infrastructure intelligence, and evaluating and disseminating the information for planning quick reaction operations. These centers also provide intelligence support for military operations. Phung Hoang operations are targeted on disrupting, harassing, capturing, and eliminating local VCI members. Phung Hoang also aims at inducing VCI members to defect, when possible."

¹¹⁴ (United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam 1970, 3, 12-13)

¹¹⁵ (Cook 1997) LTC (Ret) John Cook was assigned as a Phoenix advisor in a district outside of Saigon between 1968-1970. His memoirs describe the complete integration of the Phoenix advisors with their Vietnamese counterparts in the *Phung Hoang* program. By the end of his tour, Cook was DSA in Di An District, Bien Hoa Province.

¹¹⁶ (3d Battalion, 187th Infantry 1970, 7)

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- ¹¹⁷ (Haseman 2000, 40-43)
- ¹¹⁸ Hall, James. E-mail to William Osborne, December 31, 2011.
- ¹¹⁹ Hall, James. Interview by William Osborne in person. Bethesda, MD. January 2, 2012.
- ¹²⁰ (Cook 1997)
- ¹²¹ (Cook 1997, 217-222) Cook discusses how selling several derelict cranes provided enough extra money to the PF to markedly improve their morale and drastically decrease the need for them to rely on fellow villagers for food and other supplies.
- ¹²² (Donovan 1986)
- ¹²³ Hall, James. Interview by William Osborne in person. Bethesda, MD. January 2, 2012.
- ¹²⁴ Tomsen, Peter. E-mail to William Osborne, January 3, 2012.
- ¹²⁵ Hall, James. E-mail to William Osborne, December 31, 2011.
- ¹²⁶ Tomsen, Peter. E-mail to William Osborne, January 3, 2012.
- ¹²⁷ Tomsen, Peter. E-mail to William Osborne, January 3, 2012.
- ¹²⁸ (91st Congress, 2nd Session 1970, 11)
- ¹²⁹ (United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Assistant Chief of Staff for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support 1971)
- ¹³⁰ (Barnes 2004, 138-139)
- ¹³¹ Hall, James. E-mail to William Osborne, December 31, 2011.
- ¹³² (3d Battalion, 187th Infantry 1970, 15)
- ¹³³ Tomsen, Peter. E-mail to William Osborne, January 3, 2012.
- ¹³⁴ (Tho 1980)
- ¹³⁵ (Colby, The Virtual Vietnam Center and Archive at Texas Tech University Interview with William Colby 1981, 13, 53)
- ¹³⁶ (Scoville 1982, 58)
- ¹³⁷ (Scoville 1982, 59)
- ¹³⁸ (United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Assistant Chief of Staff for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support 1970, 14)
- ¹³⁹ (United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Assistant Chief of Staff for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support 1970, 20)
- ¹⁴⁰ (Province Senior Advisor, Quang Nam Province, Republic of Vietnam 1970, 32)
- ¹⁴¹ (Province Senior Advisor, Quang Nam Province, Republic of Vietnam 1970, 5)
- ¹⁴² (Scoville 1982, 2)

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